

Nat'l food, ag policy not going to be easy

WASHINGTON, D.C. — To insure adequate food supplies, preserve natural resources and protect Americans from agricultural vagaries, the nation may have to adopt a comprehensive food and agricultural policy, the American Association for the Advancement of Science was told Tuesday.

"Unfortunately, said Milton C. Hallberg, a Penn State agricultural economics professor, "such a policy will not be easy to forge. Its components are unclear. Interest groups have not coalesced. And policy-makers are yet to be informed about the issues and their inherent conflicts—much less ready to negotiate necessary trade-offs.

"While the enormous agricultural changes of the past 20 years are widely recognized, some critical, long-term impacts are being overlooked," Hallberg said.

"In the flush of success, American agriculture is straining under pressures that may lead to unanticipated problems. All Americans have a stake in moving from the farm-oriented policies begun in the New Deal to a comprehensive agricultural policy — one that takes into account the needs of farmers, consumers and international trade.

Some critics, he added, claim erroneously that the nation's 50-year-long agricultural support system of direct benefits to farmers has helped only farmers.

Federal farm policy, he said, has left crop and livestock production relatively free of destabilizing or chaotic market forces. As a result, consumers have enjoyed a wide variety of good food without major or prolonged shortages. Moreover,

he added, Americans probably spend less of their income for food than do any other people. Past farm policies deserve some of the credit.

Nevertheless, vast changes have occurred. An innovative overall food policy now may be necessary, he maintained.

At the heart of the issue, he explained, is the industrialization of U.S. agriculture. This has impelled a farm population decline, from 23 million in 1950 to 6 million in 1980. The result has been a tremendous shift from self-contained family farms to big farm businesses, heavily interdependent on other sectors of the economy.

In this environment, farmers have been forced to relinquish much control over not just production, but over pricing and marketing decisions. Due to increasing "coordination" by big, economically powerful non-farm firms, markets in some areas are not functioning adequately.

Simultaneously, Hallberg said, the growth of big regional or national food processing and retailing firms has eroded local agricultural support systems and ready access to markets. This has placed at a competitive disadvantage small scale producers for local or even regional markets, such as the Northeast. There have been two results: fears that non-farm regions' food supplies could be jeopardized in a crisis; and a sharp decline in farming in many U.S. counties.

Finally, he noted, recent years have seen a phenomenal rise in U.S. agricultural exports: from 17 percent of total agricultural income in 1950 to 60 percent — worth \$40 billion — in 1980. While this has

been a boon to farmers and the country's foreign trade balance, it ultimately could have undesirable consequences.

"Often," explained Hallberg, "programs meant to achieve a given aim or solve a specific problem have unintended side effects or long-term impacts. It's vital that we pinpoint potential conflicts, to determine what trade-offs will be needed.

"For example, critical to a domestic food policy is our export policy. If we are to maintain our

Early formation - occurs on reclaimed strip mines

BLACKSBURG, Va. — Given time, soil is usually developed from rock through erosion and weathering, but researchers at Virginia Tech have found early stages of soil formation in surfaces only four years old.

W. Lee Daniels and D.F. Amos, agronomist at Tech, found soil formation on land reclaimed from strip mining operations in Southwest Virginia. The researchers also found young soils on 10-year-old surfaces 20 years of age.

The shallowness, rockiness, slow permeability of surface crusts, and compaction of soil from large, heavy mining equipment are major factors limiting soil formation on surface mine spoils, the researchers agree, adding that the finely fractured mine spoil material can evolve into productive soil when properly placed and managed.

credibility in world markets, we must be able to assure dependable supplies. However, we must recognize that worldwide food demand fluctuations will occur — meaning we must develop policies to protect U.S. producers and consumers from trade uncertainties leading to wide price changes."

Also, Hallberg said, U.S. food policy must be designed to conserve land and water for future generations, to protect these resources from erosion, pollution and chemical degradation.

From an overall economic standpoint, another potential source of conflict relates to development of a transport sector

tailored mainly to the needs of exporters and grain farmers. Such a system might not adequately serve livestock producers.

"The potential conflicts are many and varied," said Hallberg. "Farmers' needs may be adverse to those of consumers. Foreign requirements may run afoul of domestic ones.

"I think we must examine our major goals and build a comprehensive food policy around those goals. While we've long helped feed the world, we must make sure we'll always have enough for ourselves — and that food will be produced safely and relatively cheaply, and be readily available at all times."

Camp Espy Farms

(Continued from Page E30)

You'll see Angus, Hereford, and Charolais in the Espy herd. "We'll feed anything," comments Herman. "It depends on the price of the feeder steers."

The animals are kept in four different groups — smallest to largest. There are over 100 in each group.

Every steer is moved through the lot whether its ready or not," Herman explains. No matter what the prices are, the steers go to market. Espy's herd is constantly changing, as he buys and sells every month.

The average steer gains about 2.45 pounds a day. The herd is fed corn silage, which is stored in several silos. A trench on the Espy farm holds 1,800 tons.

They are also fed baled hay, high moisture ear corn and some

haylage. Herman mixes urea with the corn silage, making the protein about 11 percent. In addition, each ton of corn silage gets 10 pounds of urea and 10 pounds of ground limestone to keep the calcium up in the corn.

The only feed Herman purchases is soybean meal for the young steers. They each start out with a half a pound a day.

The beef farmer of 23 years says the problem with raising beef cattle is that the price of the product depends on supply and demand. Right now, Herman isn't satisfied with the price.

Although the beef outlook for the near future isn't as bright as he'd like to see it, Espy has a lot of hopes for his best crop yield ever in 1982, and perhaps another grand champion alfalfa award.

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